

## AN IMMORTAL IN THE FLESH

i come out of my lower-division  
poetry writing class with two of  
the more talented students

and we are near the hot-dog cart  
when i spy an almost young man,  
frail and slightly bent, but possessed  
of a bright-eyed depth and virility,  
making his way across the campus  
with an armload of spanish books.

"you see that guy?" i say,  
"you are looking at a sure-fire future  
winner of the nobel prize."

they look at me as if, once again,  
i'm making some kind of inexplicable  
joke.

but this is no joke:

"that's raul zurita," i say,  
"the finest living poet in chile  
... make that in latin america."

the living part is significant,  
because he as easily could not be,  
having been tortured on a torture ship  
off the coast of his country  
in the days of the replacement  
of allende by pinochet.

one of them says, "gerry, you're shitting  
us again."

so i tell them how raul is here because  
my colleague in spanish-portuguese, Jack  
Schmitt, is now his translator for university  
of california press, and how raul has just  
returned from a reading tour of russia  
and the continent and how he will soon  
be touring america.

i explain that he speaks little english  
and i no spanish  
and he writes big oblique poems  
and i write short direct ones.

and yet there somehow from the first  
has been a warmth of camaraderie between us.

they say, "we just watched a world-class poet  
hunch incognito past the hot-dog cart?"

i say, "the greatest poet in spanish  
since neruda, is what they tell me,



and. from Jack's translations,  
i believe it."

they're still not sure  
that i'm not shitting them.

ARE WE HAVING A GOOD TIMEX YET?

"i almost overslept again." he says. i had  
it set for the right hour. but p.m.  
instead of a.m. fortunately one of your  
computer toys went off and woke me up."

"you need a regular alarm clock," she says.  
"instead of that two-buck gas station digital  
travel thing."

"i'm attached to it." he says. it lets  
me feel i'm in on the industrial productivity  
of the far east. i may trade in my eastman  
kodak stock for a piece of fuji films."

"that stock has been in your family  
for generations," she says.

"generations that never got to tokyo."  
he says. "but anyway, where would we  
put another clock in this room? it already  
looks like that storefront in quentin's  
section of the sound and the fury."

"you demean everything," she says.

he is already counting clocks out loud:  
" ... three four five six seven ...  
and none of them set to the same  
minute ...."

"you deride everything ... especially  
everything of mine."

"i'm sorry." he says. "i thought  
i was being entertaining. maybe  
amusing, maybe even witty. i would  
never ridicule the sound and the fury."

SO WHAT IS OUR EXCUSE?

a good woman poet writes that  
women abuse alcohol because  
men abuse women.